

A Pastoral Look at Suicide

A Pastoral Look at Suicide

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Preached on: Monday, September 21, 2020

Truth Community Church

4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Well, it was three weeks ago that I preached a message that generated a response that I wasn't really anticipating. The message was titled "All You Need And So Much More." It was something that I preached on the occasion of a family suicide, for those of you that weren't with us. An uncle of mine took his own life and there were things that I wanted to say to minister and to be a little bit transparent about in the course of things as a result of that. Well, that generated a response that I was not anticipating, to be honest with you, and I have been contacted by so many people within our body and outside of our body. I have lost count of how many people have told me, "I lost So-and-so to suicide. We've had this in our family." People who have dealt with attempted suicides and all of that, and there's a general sense of gratitude that I had said the things that I said, so I've been introduced to a level of heartache that, you know, has a way of staying below the surface. I can tell you that more families have been affected by suicide over the years in the life of Truth Community Church than have been affected by the COVID virus by far. By far. And in talking with the other elders, I said, "You know, I think I need to preach on this topic," and they encouraged me to do so and so here we are.

I intend this to be a one-time message, a one-off message on this matter because I believe that we need to bring darkness to light, we need to be able to talk about these things openly, we need to be able to help those that have suffered from a suicide by a loved one, and we need to help those that are struggling with suicidal thoughts of which there are probably some in the room here today. It's a dark place and it's a lonely place and the only way that I know to be able to help is to bring these things to light through the word of God, and what I love about Scripture is that it is a realistic book. I love many things about the Bible but one of the things that I come back to again and again in ministry is just how realistic the Bible is. It deals with life as it really is and the Bible records multiple people in Scripture who committed suicide: Saul, King Saul did; David's counselor Ahithophel did; most famously Judas Iscariot did. Now none of these suicides were by noble men, these were all men who had undergone spiritual collapse and had rebelled against God, and so I hold that out not as examples to be followed but simply to give you a sense that Scripture deals with this subject at least in its narrative parts of historical accounts even though it does not treat the matter of suicide directly but it has more than enough for us to understand what we should think about this.

So today's message is titled "A Pastoral Look at Suicide," and one of the things that struck me as I was just doing a little bit of research, I think the figure that I saw for 2015 maybe from the Center for Disease Control was that in 2015, the third leading cause for death among people aged 15 to 34 was suicide. It might have been second. It was either second or third, and then for children ages 10-14, it was the flip of that, maybe the third highest cause of death, to say nothing about the many military veterans that end their life in this way. This is a very sad and serious topic that we're addressing here this morning and we're doing so to bring perspective, to give help, to give warning, to give that which we believe is necessary for people to think rightly about these things. It is not surprising in a culture that devalues life at the start through its willing acceptance of abortion, it is not surprising that it is devalued toward the end of life. If life is so cheap, then what could matter if I take my own life, the thought could go in someone's mind. We need to address this. We need to come earnestly to Scripture and see what we can learn and glean from this to protect ourselves, to help our loved ones and those friends and other acquaintances that we come into contact with who may be dealing with these issues, and even to give some perspective to those who have lost, as I have on two different occasions, lost close family members to an act of self-destruction. Yes, it's a serious topic but it is one where we find the word of God speaking and the word of God ultimately giving us hope and comfort in the midst of it, and that's what I hope to be able to do here this morning.

I want to address this under five headings here this morning, and these headings aren't parallel in their grammatical structure but I think that they are the things that need to be said here this morning. We need to step back from the whole topic of suicide and start with the topic of life and to understand from where we get life and what life actually is, and so our first point for this morning is this, is that life is a gift from God. Life is a gift from God. We must start at that point. You and I are living because God has given life to us. All of the 7 ½ billion people in the world that are living today are living because God has granted life to them and the nature of human life is an important aspect of this thought. There are two lines of thought that I want to draw quickly together.

Men have life and the fact that they have life from God is an indication that God has created man in his own image. God created man in his own image. In Genesis 1:27 it says,

27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

And even after the fall of Adam, Scripture speaks of man as carrying the image of God. It is a distorted image now because of sin, but man bears the imprint of the nature of God. He's not God, he doesn't have the attributes or the essence of God, but God has put something of his own nature and imprinted it on the human race. We think with reason, we are moral creatures, we have interpersonal relationships, and all of these things are that which distinguish us from the rest of the animal kingdom and so there is a particular value to human life because it is created in the image of God and we walk as image-bearers of God. That's going to become very important later on.

Along with that, we think and we look at the text found in Psalm 139. I invite you to turn there with me. Psalm 139. It's not simply that God created the human race and then stepped back and let them propagate at will without his personal involvement. No, it's not like that at all. God is intimately involved in the formation of every human life and we see this reflected in Psalm 139, David's great Psalm that we've looked at in the past. This is important for laying the foundation of the things that we need to consider here this morning. David in worshiping God says,

13 ... You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb.
14 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. 15 My frame
was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully
wrought in the depths of the earth; 16 Your eyes have seen my unformed
substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained
for me, When as yet there was not one of them.

David saying that God formed him in his mother's womb; in the details, in the formation and as his bones were knitting together, God was intimately involved in the process. And so we see this, beloved, we see that life is a gift from God that every man, woman and child somehow bears the image of God and has been brought into existence because God himself designed that, God himself formed that child in its mother's womb, and so the fingerprints of God, you could say, I'm speaking metaphorically, I always like to make that plain when I'm talking this way, the fingerprints of God are all over the human race and they are all over each individual life that exists. The fingerprints of God are all over you because you are an image-bearer of God and God made you in your mother's womb. And for those of you that are Christians, it goes far further than that in that you were the object of the saving intentions of God when Jesus Christ died on the cross. He redeemed you from sin. He went to the cross with you specifically in mind because his redemption was specific and particular for his people. God in all of his Triune glory, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as it were, knew you. You were foreknown before the beginning of the world, before the beginning of time. God chose you for salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ and so not only are you formed by God in your mother's womb, my Christian brother, my Christian sister, you are formed spiritually by God in the redemption in the new life that he has given to you in Christ. God created you, God saved you, and so we are on the receiving end of this multifaceted wonderful work from God in making us and in saving us that just has remarkable implications.

Now beyond that, my friends, God has given you this life and God is sustaining this life that he has given to you. In Job 12 it says in God's hand is the life of very living thing, and the breath of all mankind." In Acts 17 it says in him we live and move and exist. And so God chose you as a Christian, God chose you before the foundation of the world, God formed you in your mother's womb, God sustains your life now by his providence in such perfect detail that the Bible says that all of the hairs of your head are numbered, and then all of a sudden we realize what a bountiful gift and what a bountiful manifestation of the love and care and attention of God is on all of his, all of the people of God, although it is in a non-redemptive sense, it's true of all of those who are not Christians as well. We

derive our life from God, each breath we draw is by his help and sustenance, and so no wonder, looking back at Psalm 139 as you contemplate the marvels of the wonders of these truths, no wonder, look at it with me, you must look at this text with me and understand its significance for the topic today, no wonder David says in verse 14 of Psalm 139, "I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well."

All men everywhere are under an obligation, a responsibility, a spiritual duty to respond to their Creator with humble gratitude, with adoring worship, and going further, to respond to the invitation of Christ who said, "Come to Me that you might have eternal life." Christ graciously calls every single living human being to his cross, calls them to himself that they might be redeemed from sin through his sacrifice on the cross and that they would enter into eternal life. God has given physical life and he promises spiritual life to all those who come to him. We should be in awe, we should figuratively speaking be falling on our knees with our hands lifted up to the sky, "God, how great and how good You are! You, the transcendent God of eternal essence, You have condescended to be this kind in this particular to me? God, I'm grateful. I have this life as a gift from You." Scripture could not be more clear about these things and about the particular significance of every human life. We have this life as a gift from God with an obligation to render him thanks.

Now I think you see how that frames the whole discussion about suicide. How shall we think about suicide? Well, that's what we're going to spend the rest of our time here today thinking about. The Puritan Thomas Watson said this in striking brevity, he said, "No creature but man willingly kills itself." And so life is a gift from God to be handled with gratitude, with reverence, and with care, and with appreciation for what God has given to us, and so, then, what do we say about the act of suicide? This is going to be difficult for some of you to hear. It's difficult in some ways to say this, although I'm very grateful to God for the privilege of saying what I have to say here today from his word. And let me just preface the rest of the message by saying it's important to hear me out all the way to the end, okay? You need to hear everything that I've got to say here today. Every point is of vital importance, but every point needs to be stated plainly and without qualification and without apology.

Point 2. Suicide is a serious sin against God. Suicide is a serious sin against God and it could be no other way in light of the things that we've just said. If God has done all of this for us in giving us life and then on what basis do we possibly end it at our own hand? You see, the image of God and the gift of God undergirds the sixth commandment found in Exodus 20:13 where it says,

13 You shall not murder.

You shall not end a life that God has made. Now the state has the prerogative of capital punishment in certain circumstances but when it comes to us individually acting on our own, God forbids that anyone take the life of someone else, to end the life of someone

that God has given, and Jesus expanded on that and explained the spiritual significance of that in the Sermon on the Mount when he said you shouldn't even hate your brother.

Now how does this apply to suicide? Well, let's think about that commandment and work out the implications of it. Human life is a sovereign gift from God. God made each life because it pleased him to do so and because God is the one who ordains the circumstances of life, God is working out a human life and working out each life according to an eternal plan that he established before the foundation of the world, and so human life is sacred. It is set apart in a way that is different from most of the rest, if not all of the rest of creation. You know, God gives us permission to kill animals to eat them and to sustain ourselves with them. You know, we cut down trees and build, we cut down living plants in order to feed ourselves and to build our homes. Human life is in an entirely different category than that. Human life uniquely – follow this, my friends – human life uniquely belongs to God because he made it, he regulates its existence, he sustains its existence. It is designed to give praise to him. It is designed to be a manifestation of his own image.

And so, beloved, that has far reaching consequences. It means this: because human life comes from God, it means that God alone has the prerogative to determine its end. It is not for man to determine the end of his own life. Self-destruction is a grave sin that is equivalent to murder. It does not matter that it is self-imposed. It does not matter that it is self-inflicted. Suicide is raising one's hand against a life that God created and no man should do that. You cannot do that without somehow sin being involved. Suicide assaults the image of God in man and therefore we can only see it as an act of cosmic treason, and in the spirit of Scripture, I read earlier from Matthew 15, how it talks about sin comes from the heart, what you need to understand is that it's not simply the outward act of suicide that is sinful, seriously contemplating suicide, flirting with the idea of suicide itself is sinful because it's an evil thought to even contemplate going in that direction.

Charles Spurgeon said this and, as always, it's just remarkable how he can be so profound in such a pithy way. He said this and I quote, he said, "I am deeply grieved when I hear of persons committing suicide because they were in difficulties. It is a dreadful thing to rush before one's Creator uninvited." To commit suicide is to take your life into your own hands and in a way that God forbids, ends it and then enter immediately into his presence and we're speaking metaphorically here, we're speaking figuratively here, but it's as though we could look at this and say, "What are you doing here? Why are you now in the presence of God at your own hand? Why? You have come into the presence of God with your own blood on your own hands. What have you done here?"

It's profoundly serious. It is a sin against God. It is a violation of his commandment not to take human life. It's an act of ingratitude. It's an act of, and there are various motives, I suppose, various things that are going on in people's minds and we're not going to begin to try to sort out the chaos that's in someone's mind, but it's variously a selfish act, a manipulative act or a manipulative threat. There is profound disorder in the act itself and that leads us to our third point this morning which I'll treat in the form of a question. Would a true Christian commit suicide? Would a true Christian commit suicide?

Now I'll say this again: every word that I'm about to say, every one of them is important in what I am about to say so stay with me here. No Christian with a sanctified mind would commit suicide. Period. Full stop. No Christian with a sanctified mind would ever commit suicide. Suicide is self-murder and in the language of 1 John 3:15, it says,

15 ... no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

Someone filled with the act of death, the act of murder cannot possibly be acting under the impulse of the God who is the giver of life. That is impossible.

Suicide, for those of you that struggle with suicidal thoughts and all of that, let me help you have a little bit of a perspective on it here. Suicide in addition to being self-murder, suicide is a rejection, it can only be understood as a rejection of the life and circumstances which God has graciously given to you. As I've said many times from this pulpit and I hope God gives me breath to say it many times more, my friends, you have the life that God has given to you. For some you have prosperity and happiness and security. Others have a life of sorrow and difficulty and anguish, even, and I understand that, but we are to understand that God in his wisdom, God in his kindness, has assigned to you the circumstances and lot in life that you have. God works all things after the counsel of his own will and so you can only end your own life by rejecting the life that God has given to you. That can't be anything other than a grievous sin.

Now turn, you're in the book of Psalms, turn to the book of Proverbs for a moment because I want to bring out another aspect of spiritual truth here as we consider these things. Proverbs 3:5-6 says this, it says,

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways [in all your ways] acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. 7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil. 8 It will be healing to your body And refreshment to your bones.

So beloved, Scripture calls us to this submissive trust in the Lord. It calls us to this acceptance of what he has ordained for us, and to respond with a trusting attitude of submission and obedience to the circumstances that he has appointed for us. Don't you see, don't you see, my friends, that suicide is direct defiance of that spirit of trust and obedience that God has called us to? Don't you see why I say that a Christian with a sanctified mind could never contemplate such an act? A grounded Christian understanding the revelation of God, understanding the word of God, understanding the goodness of God, understanding the providence of God, understanding the judgment of God, would never take matters into his own hands in that dark way.

So we say no Christian with a sanctified mind would ever commit suicide and I need to take it one step further. You know, Scripture warns us – I'm gonna take a little detour here – Scripture warns men to examine themselves to see whether they be in the faith. 2

Corinthians 13:5, "Test yourselves to see whether you're in the faith." Well, friends, there's no doubt that some people thinking that they are Christians have committed suicide thinking that they would enter into the presence of God and all of their troubles would be over, and all of the sadness of life would be ended by ending their own life, but what we must understand in light of the foundation that we've laid here from the word of God, what we must understand is the one who contemplates suicide seriously or the one who commits suicide we have to deal with this reality, we cannot play games and allow men to deceive themselves on such a critical point like this: the one who contemplates or commits suicide very seriously may not be saved. They may think that they are a Christian when they commit this act only to awake to a far worse reality that is irreversible.

Turn to that familiar passage in Matthew 7 with me. Matthew 7, and as you're turning there, let me just remind you, you've got to stay with me and hear it all. The whole message needs to be heard here. This is not the time to tune out just because this part is hard. Matthew 7:21 says,

21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.
22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

This is not a passage directly about suicide obviously but it's making the broader point that I want to emphasize here. Many people enter into eternity thinking that they are right with God, thinking that somehow Christ is Lord, only to find out that the reality is very different and they find instead of being welcomed into peace and rest, they are being cast away into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Let that sink in on you. Let that thought sink into your mind. Surely, surely many take their lives only to hear those horrifying words from the Lord Jesus. Again, Spurgeon says, "He that kills himself goes with his hands red with blood before his Maker and goes from there to his own damnation."

We could explore at greater depth what I'm about to say, I'm just going to make this point. Certainly every act of suicide has a dark demonic influence at work. This kind of death and self-destruction is the work of the devil. He's a murderer from the beginning, Jesus said, and so there is a demonic satanic element in all of this that is taking place, and so we need to pause here for just a moment and step back, is that there is nothing commendable about suicide to be said. There is no spiritual virtue in the act whatsoever. It is a defiant act against God by those who commit it with their right minds. And anyone contemplating suicide must be warned, "Don't do this! Don't do that! You're playing with forces that you do not recognize. There are consequences beyond what you intend. Don't end your life on such a sin against God." Let me just remind you, this has family implications for me. I do not say these things lightly or coldly whatsoever. This is the reality of it.

Having said all of these things, we need to fill out our view, we need to qualify our view, we need to qualify these statements in this limited way. You and I as living beings, you and I must understand and think about individual acts of suicide recognizing that we lack all the answers. We lack all the answers. Physical conditions may interfere with right thinking. Some prescription drugs have the most perverse of side effects that might be involved here. And so we understand that as we say these things clearly from the word of God, that we are not the final judge of an individual's soul. We are speaking in general principles that Scripture makes very clear. If, therefore, with those things in mind, if there is a rare Christian who commits suicide, the blood of Christ would indeed cover him and there is forgiveness even in that act that is so severe and so sinful because our justification rests in the righteousness of Christ, not our own. The blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin. And even Spurgeon, I'm not quoting from him on these things, but even Spurgeon qualifies his statements on this in this way in which I'm speaking, we're speaking about people who do this in their right mind with their reason intact, so to speak, and so we're not making judgments about individuals here. What we are doing is saying this, in light of everything that God's word says, we say this: no one, no one should assume that suicide will usher them into heaven. No one should assume that. Whatever's true about the people that have gone on by that means of self-destruction, we're leaving that with God. We're not commenting on that, we're speaking to the living. I can't speak to the dead. That privilege is not given to us but I can speak to you, I can speak to the living, and I can warn you do not assume that your self-destruction would lead you into heaven. The truth is you should assume the exact opposite and let the fear of God be that which protects you from such an awful act.

So we warn living men against suicide on the basis of the things that we have said here, and for those that have committed suicide, we leave their judgment to God where it belongs without creating false hope for anyone, without presuming to make final judgment against anyone. There are these places in Scripture, in pastoral ministry, in understanding where you step up to a line, you say everything that should be said, and then you step back and say, "I've said all that I should say here." And so these are the things that we need to contemplate. We have seen that life is a gift from God, suicide is a serious sin against God. We've given a somewhat qualified answer to the question would a true Christian commit suicide. Highly unlikely but recognizing that maybe there are exceptions there that based on other factors that we're not in a position to judge and we realize this.

Now this next half of the message we want to bring a matter of comfort and perspective and help for the situation and for the topic. So let's look at point 4 here this morning, and just speak to you if your loved one has committed suicide. If you, like me, have loved ones that have committed suicide, what would God's word say to you? How would it help you? In the aftermath of suicide, painful, painful questions plague our minds, don't they? Why did she do it? Why didn't I see this coming? Is this somehow my fault? Where are they now? I understand those questions. I sympathize with those questions but I want to help you think rightly about them to go in a way that is actually helpful to your mind. I have to encourage you and call you to a shift in focus, okay? So stay with me here.

The question why did they do it is really unanswerable. We can't know exactly why they do. Even if they write a note, we don't know if the note actually signifies what they were thinking or if it's what they wanted us to think. We can't know that. The heart of man is very deep and it is not possible for us to sort out motives like that. I mean, the heart of man is deceitful above all else, who can understand it? That question is not productive. It's a question that I would encourage you to let go into the hands of God. Is this somehow your fault? No. This was an act by a responsible being. Why didn't I see this coming? Look, all of these questions are ultimately unanswerable and what your focus needs to be if you have gone through this or when you go through it in the future, your focus needs to be on something else, something different. You need to think on that which you know to be true. What you know to be true. And what we know to be true is given to us in the word of God. It does us no good to speculate on human motives at such a time as an act like that. It does us no good to speculate on eternal issues when that veil is not open for us to peer into. And speaking from experience in other areas, I can tell you that that just leads you into a pit that you can't, it's very hard to get out of because you want answers to these questions that there is no authority by which they can be answered with certain finality.

So we take our minds in a different direction and we think instead on what is true. We think on what is true and in the words of Genesis 18, we come to a question like this that answers itself, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do justice?" You step back away from the act, the loss, the human loss, and you think right thoughts about God that are independent of the act of suicide and you say, "You know what? I remember some things about the character of God. He is righteous. He is God. He is sovereign. He is wise. He knows what is best and He can only do what is right. And because that is true about God, then I can know that whatever He does with this individual circumstance will be right and I rest in that. I rest in the wisdom and the righteousness and the justice of God for what has happened in the past, and I leave it there. I trust in the Lord with all my heart and I do not lean on my own understanding. I'm going to acknowledge Him and His glory and His majesty and His righteousness and His sovereign goodness and I'm gonna rest in that. What else can I do? I can't know the answer to the human question with any certainty but I know this for sure." And you rest your heart there.

For another perspective on it, look at on this point, look at Galatians 2:20. I'm speaking to Christians now. Christians are the ones who can reason like this. Galatians 2:20. You remember the sovereign wisdom, the sovereign justice of God. He must do right because he can do nothing else but right and therefore he will deal rightly with this past act. Now in verse 20 of Galatians 2, you think like a Christian, you think in light of Christ, you think in light of the cross. You say,

20 I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

"I have a Savior whom I trust. I have a Savior who loved me and gave Himself up for me. I have an indwelling Spirit who drew me to Christ. I have a sovereign God who chose me before the foundation of the world. I have a Christ who bled on the cross to make atonement for my sins. I have a Christ who's risen from the dead, ascended in heaven who loves me and is interceding for me at the very right hand of God. Even as I speak, even as I wave my hand in the air, Christ is there interceding for me. And because He is like that, I trust Him for my soul. I know that He's dealt well with my soul. I know that I'm secure in His love. I know that He's been good to me. I trust Him completely for everything that pertains to me."

Now, beloved, that's what it means to be a Christian. You trust Christ like that, okay? Now stay with me. This line of thinking transformed my life many years ago. Here's what you have to understand if you have lost a loved one to suicide or to a death and you're not certain of their spiritual destiny and you can't answer that question, here's the way that you must think as a Christian. You must think this way. You must. "I trust Christ for my soul and you know what I'm gonna do? He's so good and wise and sovereign, I'm gonna trust Him for everyone else's soul also. I'm gonna trust Him for what He does with the soul of my loved one even if I don't know now in this life. If I don't know throughout all of eternity, I'm gonna trust Him for that because He's worthy of that trust."

You see, my friends, this comes down to what you believe to be true about Jesus Christ. Is he loving? Is he trustworthy? Is he holy? Well, if he is, trust him for it all and find the rest that your soul otherwise would lack. There's no other answer. You can spend years looking for a different refuge and if you're honest with yourself, you'll realize that there is no other. This is our refuge. Watch this, it is not the answer to your question about your loved one that you need, it is Christ that you need, and it is in Christ that you rest all of your trust and you say, "I will trust Him to do right even when I don't understand. I will trust Him to do right even when my heart is broken. And I will trust Him even further, that throughout all of eternity I am going to be satisfied with His goodness, with His righteousness, and there is no possibility that I who have believed in Christ will ever be disappointed in the outcome. He will vindicate my trust to perfection even though I have to live for a time without answers that I might like to have." This is your Christ, my friends. This is how great and exalted and sovereign and good he is. He can take care of even this matter of which we speak and that is your refuge, trusting in him and not leaning on your own understanding. Certainly not, I would hope to God that no one in this room would ever do this, but I feel the need to say what I'm about to say, certainly never going to some kind of spiritual medium, some kind of psychic trying to connect with your lost ones. That's a grievous sin against God and a complete denial of trusting him. You'll turn to the agents of the devil to find out the answers to your soul? No. No, we don't go there. We rule all of that out ahead of time. "I won't go there with that. I'll go to Christ who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

Now fifthly and finally here. Let me speak to those of you that are perhaps in despair here this morning and let me give you the alternative to suicide. The alternative to suicide and as we're thinking about it corporately, as we're thinking together about this as Christians and how we can minister to one another, you and I need to understand this as we seek to

love people and to help them: it is not enough for us to condemn suicide as a sin against God, we need to do that so that the lines are clear, but we need to also be able to bring help to those that are hurting and contemplating these things and that's what I want to do in these remaining few minutes here this morning. The alternative to suicide. So let me just ask this question. I'm speaking as a friend to everyone who's in here. If you find yourself in despair, I've been there. How could I criticize you for that? The Psalmists were often in despair and had to find their way out through trusting God. If you're in despair, let me assure you biblically that you are not alone. You're not alone.

Look over at 1 Kings 19, going back before the Psalms, before Chronicles, 1 Kings 19. There is a prophet named Elijah, great prophet of God, and he had just won a spectacular victory over the prophets of Baal and slain 450 of them to the great consternation of the wicked queen of Israel named Jezebel who was a Baal worshiper. She did not want Elijah to do that. She hated Elijah for what he had done. Now in 1 Kings 19,

1 Now Ahab told Jezebel [the queen] all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." [You killed the prophets of Baal, I'm gonna kill you.] 3 And [Elijah] was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. 4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers."

Elijah, a prophet of God, wanted to die because he was afraid of what was going to come. He'd had this great experience, this triumphant experience and he went from the mountaintop to Death Valley in a matter of hours. Sometimes it works like that. He didn't take his life into his own hands but he told God, "God, I want to die. I don't like this. I want out. I want my ticket out of here. Take me." That's a pretty bold and strong prayer, isn't it? Notice the gentle way that the Lord dealt with him. Notice how God did not abandon his prophet even though he voiced a preference for death over life. I love this.

5 He lay down and slept under a juniper tree; and behold, there was an angel touching him [that physical touch], and he said to him, "Arise, eat." 6 Then [Elijah] looked and behold, there was at his head a bread cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again. 7 The angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise, eat, because the journey is too great for you." 8 So he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God.

Now I just want to point out some basic things to you here. God did not abandon his prophet in the midst of that death wish, that ill-directed death wish, you might say. Instead he refreshed his prophet with simple physical care. He refreshed his prophet with

rest and with nutrition and with encouraging words. My friend, if you are in despair here this morning, I want to give you a simple place to start: you need to take care of your body. Get some fresh air. Get some sleep. Get some nourishment and start there. If I could put it this way, you need to get out of your dark room, you need to stop eating Doritos in a dark room in front of your computer screen for 20 hours a day. You're not going to find your way out of despair living like that. You need to abandon that and get away from it and into a proper form of life. There's a physical dimension to it that you should not neglect.

Along with that let me say this: take care of your soul as well. Take care of your soul. Make the effort, as all of you have done here in the room today, make the effort to come and be with God's people. You need to be with the people of God. This is where we find so much of our encouragement in our Christian lives. Hebrews 10:24-25 talks about that. We need to encourage one another. We can't do it alone. We need to set aside your spiritual lethargy and indifference and get together with God's people. Pick up the word of God. Let me make it simple: read the 10th chapter of John. You could read a lot of passages but just read John 10 and let the word of God wash over your mind and refresh yourself. Commit your hurting soul to a faithful God in prayer. "O God, help me! I don't even know what to say, God, I just ask for mercy because I am in despair and like Elijah I don't see the point in living but my eyes are on You."

Now you might say, "Why should I bother with this? Why bother? Life has been this way a long time and it's not gonna change tomorrow." Well, let's close with another familiar passage, Matthew 11. My despairing, unworthy friend, feeling unworthy what I mean by that, feeling unworthy to go to the presence of God, having lost any hope that God will hear or care about your prayer, nothing could be further from the truth. Your despair has led you into a terrible self-deception if you think that way. Let's let the words of Christ cut through the fog of discouragement and despair and see what a friend has his hand extended to you. He says,

28 "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

There's a sense in which, I suppose, you could reduce the contemplation of suicide to this simple statement. I think you can boil it down to this, "Life is so bad that I'm going to kill myself." There's a better way to think that doesn't change your first assessment. This is the way to think, my friend in despair, you say, "Life is so bad I must go to Christ and find this rest that He promised." Yes, life is bad, life is hard, life is sad, I get that. I've been there but taking armed against yourself and sinning against God can't possibly be the answer. It is not, "Life is so bad that I'll kill myself," the way that we think, "Life is so bad I must go to Christ now. I must have Jesus here. He must show me faithfulness to this merciful promise that He made. He made it to all men. Here I am, weak, weary, heavy-laden. Christ, here I am. Be faithful to Your promise. I'm desperate and my eyes are nowhere else but on Thee."

That, my friend in despair, is where you go. You see, there is no sin that you have committed that Christ is unwilling to forgive. He'll forgive all of your sins. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin and unrighteousness. If it's over profound guilt that you feel like you must destroy yourself, understand Christ can deal with that. There's no sin that he won't wash away gladly. He came to save the lost. My friend, there's no sorrow that Jesus Christ cannot transform into joy. There is no sheep that he has ever lost. Not one. And he never will. And so you go in your dirty wool, bleating, "Life is bad," and trust that the Shepherd will take you, cleanse you, welcome you into the fold and restore you to what he intended your life to be when he first made you.

So turn away from those suicidal thoughts. Cast your sad and beleaguered soul on the friend of sinners and like countless men and women throughout the ages, you will find that he's faithful to his promise. He always has, he always will, he'll be that way for you too.

Let's pray together.

Father, look on these dear friends and be gracious to them. Father, work in a way that halts the despair and gives a flaming sense of hope to those in darkness. Give them that light that they can walk toward. Father, for those of us that have lost loved ones in this dreadful way, we commit all of that to You. We cannot begin to sort it out but You can, and in simple trust we believe Your promise that for those of us that know You and love You, somehow, Lord, in a way that we can't begin to anticipate, You will cause all things to work together for good to those who love You and are called according to Your purpose. And so with grateful hearts, for some of us with bruised hearts, Father, for some with despairing hearts, we look to You and pray that by the gracious ministry of Your Holy Spirit You would wonderfully tend to the need of each one here today, each one over the live stream, each one hearing this in subsequent media. Do Your work, O God. Show Yourself, O Christ, the great friend of sinners. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Thanks for listening to Pastor Don Green from Truth Community Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. You can find church information, Don's complete sermon library and other helpful materials at thetruthpulpit.com. This message is copyrighted by Don Green. All rights reserved.